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ABSTRACT

The desirability and format of a network among libraries and resource centers serving the gerontological/geriatric field were addressed in a research project funded by the Special Libraries Association. Heads of 50 gerontological and 50 geriatric libraries were surveyed by mail to determine if there was interest in a joint network, i.e., a formal cooperative venture among several libraries through the sharing of services and resources, and to find out what a network should and could offer its participants. Though gerontological and geriatric libraries were initially separated for data analysis, all results assumed a joint network. Results indicated that the majority of the respondents favored such a network and that their sponsoring organizations would support it. A majority would pay a membership fee and would prefer a designated network headquarters. Bibliographic projects were ranked as the most important network activity by 95% of the respondents, and a comparison of products and services available and those desired indicated that the most likely products and services to be available are interlibrary loan, publications, journal holding lists, clearinghouse functions, bibliographic computer searches, union catalogs, and SDI (selective dissemination of information). (LMM)

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# NETWORKING AMONG GERONTOLOGICAL AND GERIATRIC RESOURCE CENTERS: SUMMARY OF A SURVEY

ED237104

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ABSTRACT:

To lay the groundwork for a formal, subject oriented network of resource centers serving the field of aging, a survey of heads of libraries in the gerontological/geriatric field determined the desirability of such a cooperative venture. The majority of the special librarians in the field also believed that their parent organizations would support the network. Also explored were preferences for network structure and components feasible for networking.

The special libraries community has for a long time advocated networking activities. It seemed an interesting concept to maximize the resources and minimize the costs.

This research project, funded by the Special Libraries Association, addressed the feasibility and selected issues of a network among libraries/resource centers serving the field of aging.

As the older population increases--every 9th American is 65+[1]--so does the output of information products concerned with aging issues, challenging the information professional to track, obtain and disseminate the data, research results and other materials (print and non-print) generated by statisticians and professionals in the field.

Professionals in the field is an aggregate term, defying exact definition, because of the interdisciplinary nature of the aging field which draws from the expertise and interests of sociologists, psychologists, biologists, public administrators, physicians, economists and others.

Considering the diversity of the "field", it is not surprising to find two categories of information centers serving the users interested in the processes and implications of human aging: gerontological libraries and geriatric libraries.

JOINT NETWORK

Initially the survey was designed to clearly separate the two categories and the instrument was mailed to fifty directors of gerontological libraries (concerned with the social, economic and advocacy aspects of aging) and fifty heads of geriatric resource centers (biomedical in focus). When interpreting the survey results it became apparent that this distinction was impractical, reflecting the growing recognition of the integration of all aspects of aging. For data analysis purposes all results therefore assume a joint network, a geriatric and gerontological partnership.

The idea for this project was conceived by a group of gerontological librarians who recognized the need for a cooperative venture, in the early seventies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At about the same time came a strong and convincing plea for a comprehensive information system from Miller and Cutler[2] who stated that such a system would enable the information user to obtain relevant information, effectively and efficiently.

A review of the literature surfaces some monographs and journal articles presenting the practical aspects of a special library network.[3,4] The subject of specifically aging-related network activities is in the form of a question in an Administration on Aging preliminary report[5]: "Can the vast array of knowledge already accumulated be organized into a single comprehensive system? Or must the field subdivide into manageable parts usable by persons with particular research, teaching, and practice interests?" Comprehensive or subdivided system - both seem to have merits and may be topics for comparison research.

NETWORKING

However, this research project explores networking issues, opting for the comprehensive approach. And because the term "networking" means different things to different people, it is not surprising that a literature search yields to a good number of titles not appropriate to this project. Looking at networking on the level of utilities (such as OCLC), regional systems (AMIGOS through WLC), subject data bases or special software packages (PHILSOM, etc.), showed that all are beyond the scope of this project and not included here, although a future research project could look at the interaction of large established networks with smallsubject-oriented networks.

For the purpose of the project the term network is defined here as a formal cooperative venture among several libraries through the sharing of services and resources. The difficulties of such an undertaking are clearly assessed by Atherton.[6] "Diverse groups of information services must organize and arrive a common objectives and direct resources, of men, money, machines, methods, and management skills to do the work. Networks and network organizations make a series of new demands of persons who perform as system negotiators, brokers, network managers, or facilitators. There are no extrinsic rules determining who can initiate and who can operate information networks. The intrinsic prerequisites are competence, involvement with and knowledge of operations and user needs, and genuine dedication to the information community's requirements for integrated network services."

RESULTS

Even starting up and maintaining a small network is difficult and probably impossible without preliminary assessment of some basic factors: Is there any interest in such a venture? What should and can it offer its participants?

The following is a brief summary of the survey findings. Thanks to AARP's Research & Data Resources Unit*, SPSS sub-programs were used to manipulate the collected data.

* headed by Dick Kriner

The first set of questions proves conclusively that heads of gerontological and geriatric resource centers are in favor of networking: 92.1% in favor, and 7.6% opposed (see Chart 1). Because these centers are operating within the framework of a larger organization, it was equally important to get data on parent organization support (as perceived by library management) for such a network. I am happy to report that a significant majority - 81.6% - believed that the parent organization definitely or probably would support networking. Only 13.2% believe that their organization would not provide the needed support (see Chart 2).

A closer look at the data, cross-tabulating parent organization's perceived support with nature of parent organization, shows that resource centers within an academic institution are most heavily represented with 47.4%; followed by centers sponsored by aging organizations or governmental units with 19.4%. Equally represented at 16.7% are resource centers serving a governmental unit, and "others", including a center at a medical facility within a multiple hospital system, a professional organization, a rehabilitation agency, a non-profit nursing home and Administration on Aging unit (see Chart 3). The size of the resource centers measured by collection volume range from small (less than 5000 volumes at 62.2% to more than 10,000 volumes at 37.8%.

With the determination of a favorable attitude as a backdrop, network organization preferences are examined: 86.1% responded affirmatively to the question "Would you be willing to pay a membership fee," with 13.9% responding negatively (see Chart 4). The high number of positive responses may signal a real commitment of resource centers toward networking, although with a caveat, since the graduated-fee-structure-questions allowed for a rather wide range: the summary shows that 50% of those responding to the question would be willing to pay up to $10;46.7% would pay up to $100 (see Pie Chart 5). Unable to interpret the response to this question accurately, it is hoped the skewing toward the lower end of the fee scale is due to the reality of low money resources rather than a low commitment factor. However, it is assumed that the willingness to pay even a nominal fee strengthens the case for networking.

Preference for a network planning meeting in conjunction with an annual meeting of a major professional organization yielded the following data: 50% preferred the planning meeting to be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America (which tends to be enhanced by the American Geriatric Society's participation); 17.6% opted for a meeting scheduled to take place at the Special Libraries Association annual conference; an equal number, 17.6% preferred calling a special meeting for the sole purpose of organizing the network; 8.8% chose to have a meeting at the

annual meeting of the Medical Libraries Association, and the remainder, 5.9%, would like the meeting to be held with the Western Gerontological Society or other regional professional organization (see Pie Chart 6).

It seemed logical to poll preferences for the organizational structure of the network since the politics of a complex entity play a leading role in its formation. The results are as follow: 9.1% - would like network chair; 54.5% - would prefer a designated network headquarter; and 6.1% - proposed the appointment/selection of an ad-hoc committee to study existing small networks, especially medical library networks, and submit a plan to prospective participants (see Chart 7).

While the first part of the survey addressed the desirability and format of a network among the resource centers serving the field of aging, the next part deals with its activities, services and products.

A. The request to rate sixteen traditional library activities by importance yielded the following results shown in Chart 8. Bibliographic projects were ranked by 95% of the respondents as the most important activity for such a network. Only the first six activities from a list of fifteen fall within a meaningful distribution from the base line (determined at 56.2% frequency). An interpretation of the data summary shows that bibliographic projects, interlibrary loan, union catalog, clearinghouse, reference and cataloging are ranked highest in importance as cooperative activities in a network seeting.

B. Another item was the request "Check products and services your resource center would share on a regular basis with network participants." The response meant to elicit information on the availability of products and services while the first set (importance of activities) produced a "wish list." Ranking products/services by frequency offered determined the following pattern. (see Chart 9). The mean, located at 38.6% determined the arithmetic average of the widely dispersed raw data - maximum 77.8%; minimum 5.6%. The first seven products/services fall above this average and it can be concluded that interlibrary loan, publications, journal holdings lists, clearinghouse

functions, bibliographic computer searches, union catalogs and SDI are the most likely products/services to be available to network members.

A comparison of charts 8 and 9 shows that a number of services or products are considered both important and are available. These include interlibrary loans, reference services, e.g. automatic bibliographic retrieval, SDI, clearinghouse functions and publication programs. All of these could be considered the core of the network and should be first explored. It should be noted that by joining the national bibliographic utilities OCLC, Inc., interlibrary loan and cataloging activities can be realized. Union catalogs could eventually obtained by merging archival tapes.

Of some interest was also the status of current network affiliation. Data show that in 1981 15.8% of the respondents participated formally in a network (probably centers connected with Veterans Administration institutions) and 34.2% belonged to an informal network which most likely encompasses interlibrary loans and electronic mail.

This research project explores the "how" and "what" of a potential gerontological/geriatric network. I want to conclude by briefly touching on the "why", paraphrasing S.E. Neill's statement.[7] "Networks are essential if all necessary knowledge is to be

made available even in the smallest social unit. Local ownership of resources is a roadblock to free information flow, not because of physical factors, but more because of the psychology of inward-looking selfishness that the idea of ownership inculcates."

The "when" and "where" is up to the movers and shakers among information professionals. I hope that we, the information professionals, use the survey data to bring about a gerontological/geriatric network, and all of us, as information user, insist on the pooling of resources via networking.

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This research project was made possible by a grant-in-aid of the Special Libraries Association in 1981. My thanks to the SLA Research Committee, headed by Dr. Fred Roper.

Chart 1. Favor or Oppose Networking.

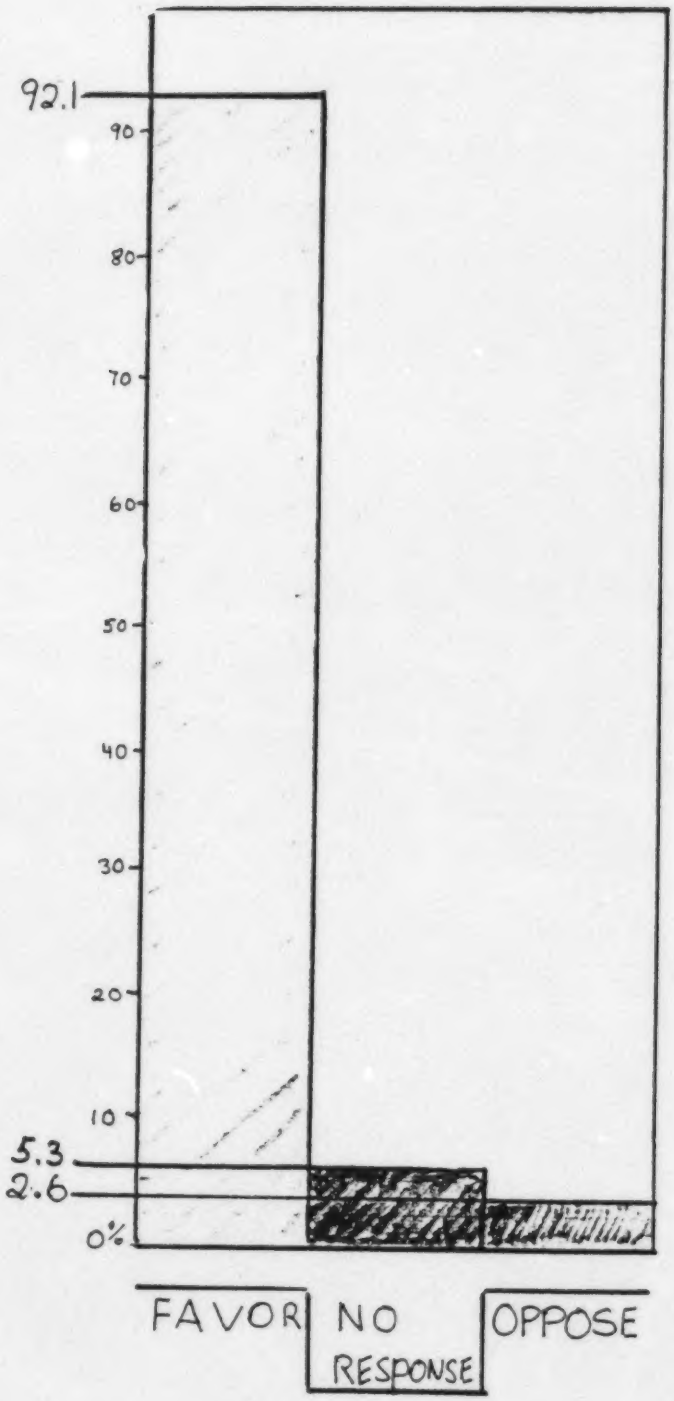

92.1
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
5.3
2.6
0%
FAVOR
NO RESPONSE
OPPOSE

Chart 2. Belief in Parent Organization Support for Network.

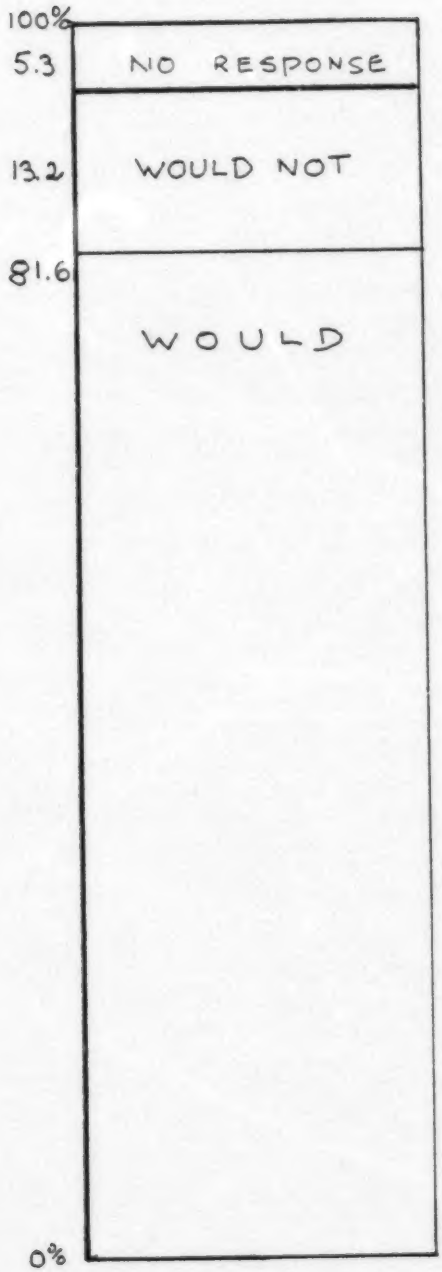

100%
5.3
NO RESPONSE
13.2
WOULD NOT
81.6
WOULD
0%

Table 3. Belief in Parent Organization Support by nature of Parent Organization.

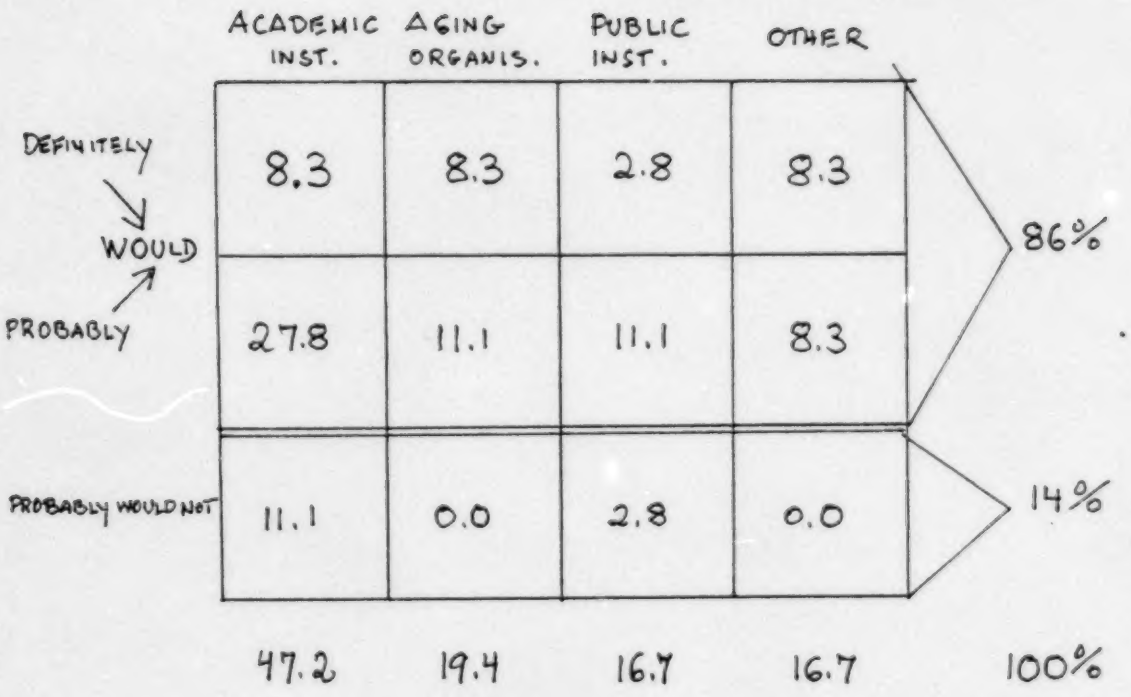

ACADEMIC INST.
AGING ORGANIS.
PUBLIC INST.
OTHER
DEFINITELY
WOULD
PROBABLY
8.3
8.3
2.8
8.3
27.8
11.1
11.1
8.3
86%
PROBABLY WOULD NOT
11.1
0.0
2.8
0.0
14%
47.2
19.4
16.7
16.7
100%

Chart 4. Willingness to Pay Membership Fee.

RATIO IN FAVOR OF WILLINGNES TO PAY FEE = 6

$$f = \frac{31}{5} = 6$$

Chart 5. Amounts Willing to Pay for Network Membership.

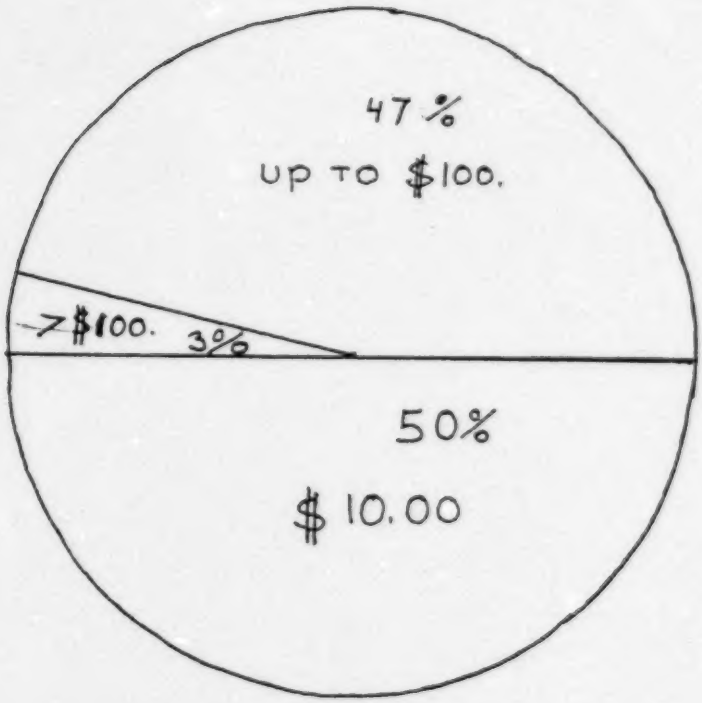

47%
UP TO $100.
7 $100. 3%
50%
$10.00

Chart 6. Network Planning Meeting
in Conjunction with ----.

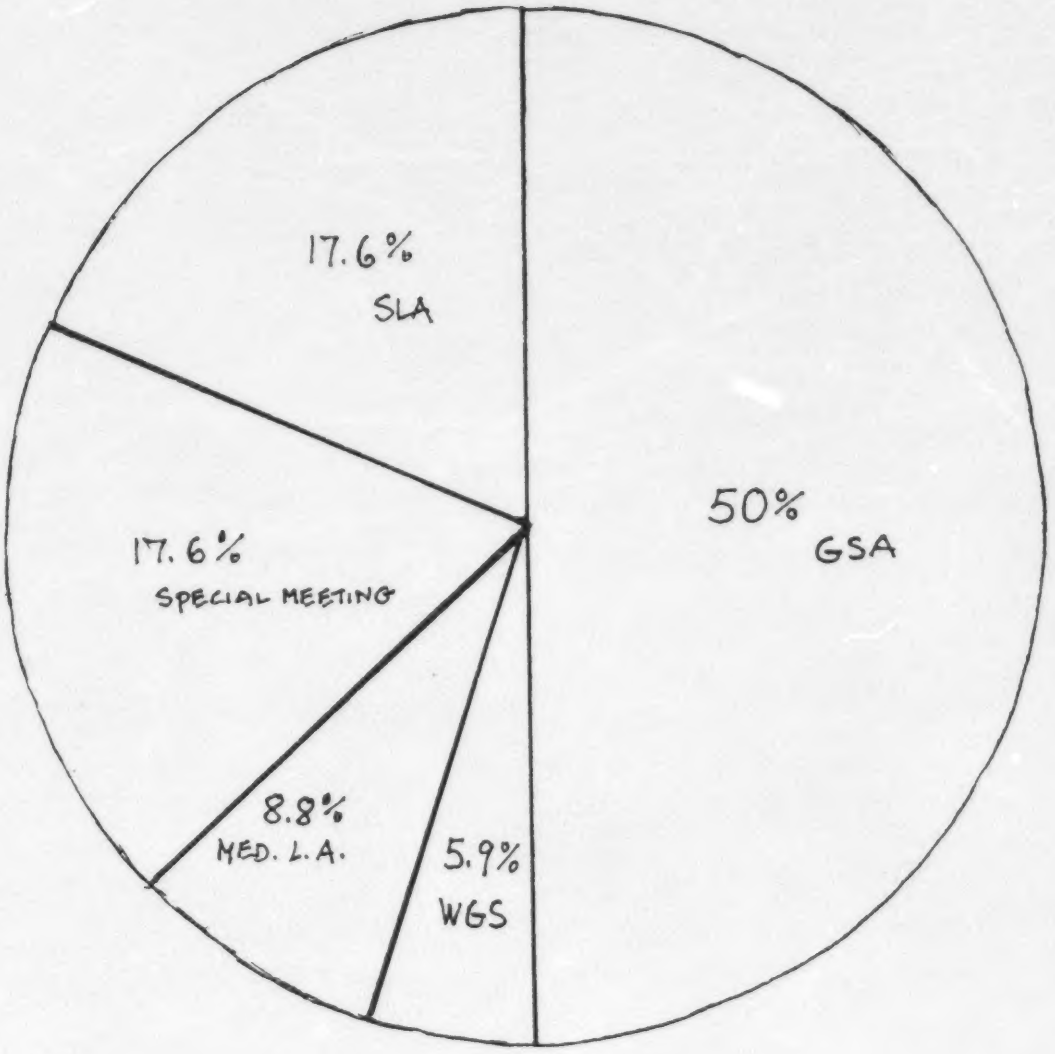

17.6%
SLA
50%
GSA
17.6%
SPECIAL MEETING
8.8%
MED. L.A.
5.9%
WGS

Chart 7. Network Organization Structure.

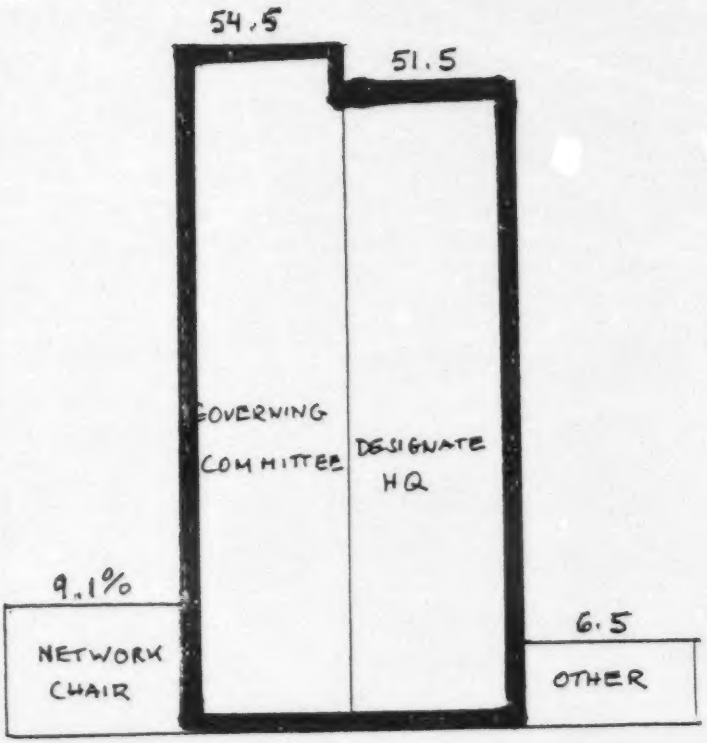

54.5
51.5
GOVERNING COMMITTEE
DESIGNATE HQ
9.1%
NETWORK CHAIR
6.5
OTHER

Chart 8. Library Activities
by Rank of Importance to Network.

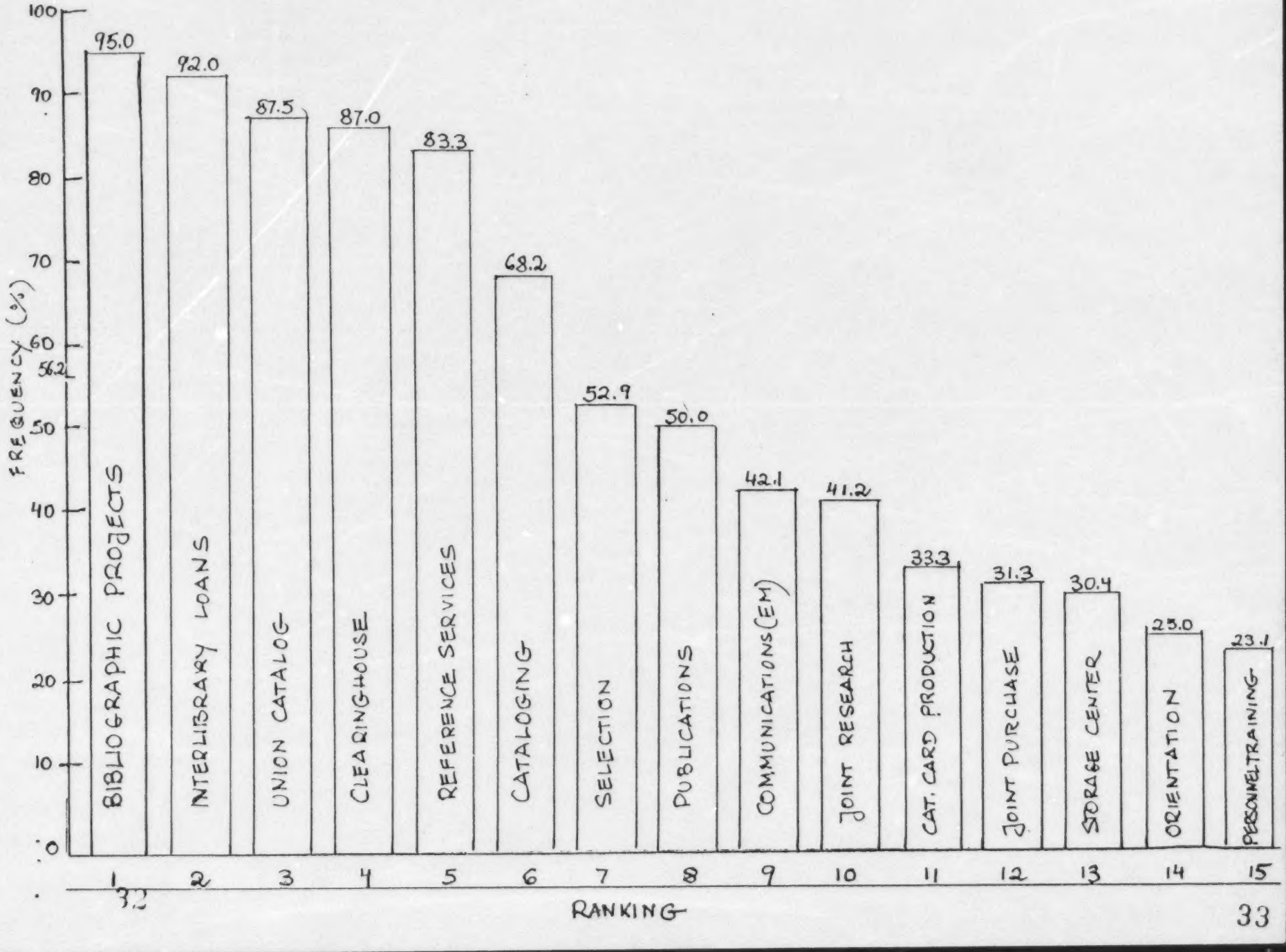
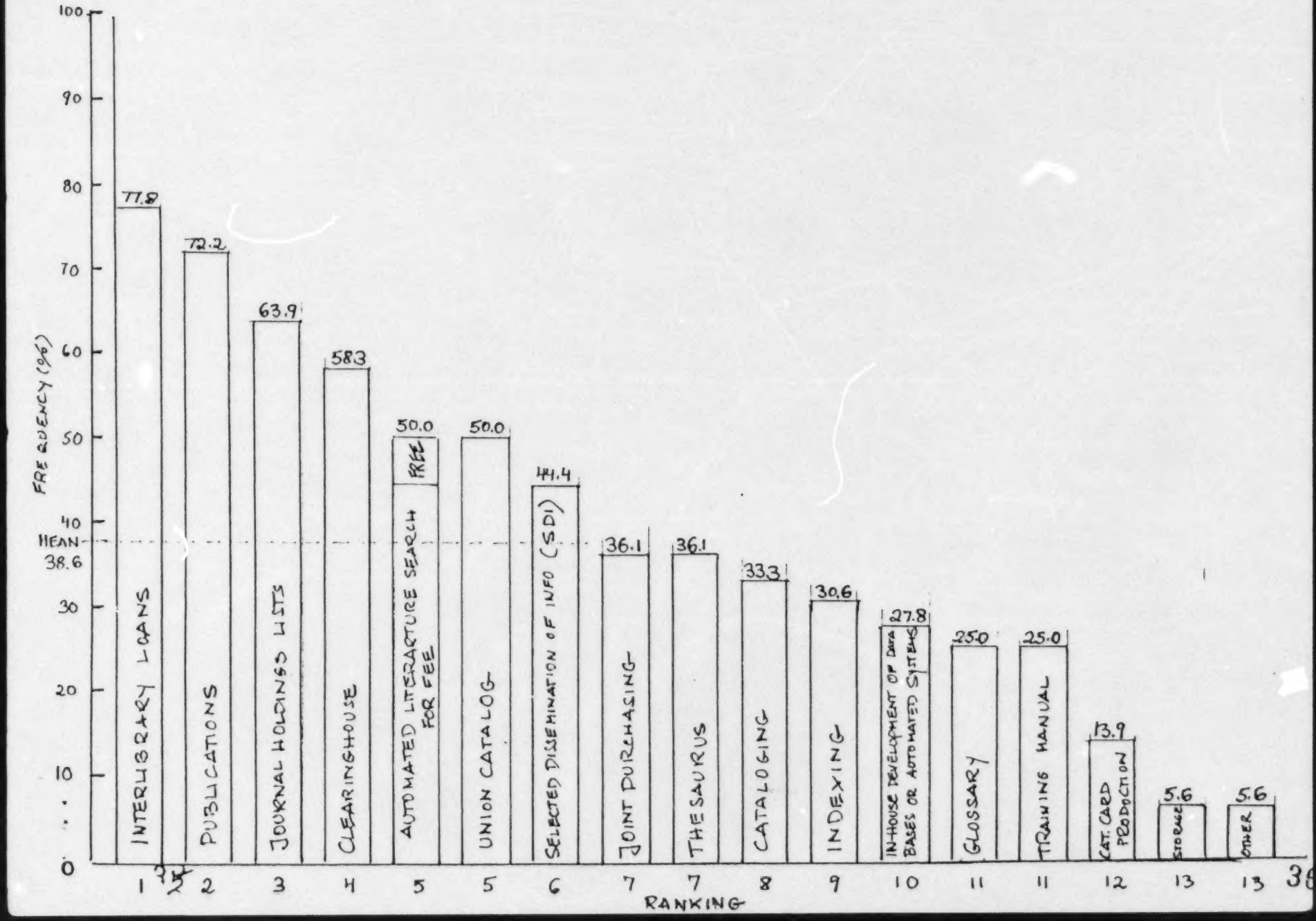

FREQUENCY (%)
100
90
80
70
60
52
50
40
30
20
10
0
95.0
92.0
87.5
87.0
83.3
68.2
52.9
50.0
42.1
41.2
33.3
31.3
30.4
23.0
23.1
BIBLIOGRAPHIC PROJECTS
INTERLIBRARY LOANS
UNION CATALOG
CLEARINGHOUSE
REFERENCE SERVICES
CATALOGING
SELECTION
PUBLICATIONS
COMMUNICATIONS (EM)
JOINT RESEARCH
CAT. CARD PRODUCTION
JOINT PURCHASE
STORAGE CENTER
ORIENTATION
PERSONNEL TRAINING
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
RANKING

Chart 9. Products/Services Available for Sharing within the Network.


FREQUENCY (%)
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
MEAN
38.6
30
20
10
0
INTERLIBRARY LOANS
77.8
PUBLICATIONS
72.2
JOURNAL HOLDINGS LISTS
63.9
CLEARINGHOUSE
58.3
AUTOMATED LITERATURE SEARCH FOR FEE
50.0
FREE
UNION CATALOG
50.0
SELECTED DISSEMINATION OF INFO (SDI)
41.4
JOINT PURCHASING
36.1
THESAURUS
36.1
CATALOGING
33.3
INDEXING
30.6
IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT OF DATA BASES OR AUTOMATED SYSTEMS
27.8
GLOSSARY
25.0
TRAINING MANUAL
25.0
CAT. CARD PRODUCTION
13.9
STORAGE
5.6
OTHER
5.6
1
2
3
4
5
5
6
7
7
8
9
10
11
11
12
13
13
RANKING

SURVEY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD NETWORKING
GERONTOLOGICAL AND GERIATRIC LIBRARIES/RESOURCE CENTERS

Because this survey is being sent to libraries/resource centers whose focus may be either gerontology or geriatrics, or both, please indicate the focus of your library/resource center.

Circle One

☐
A GERONTOLOGY
B GERIATRICS
C BOTH, GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS

Parent organization

☐
1 ACADEMIC INSTITUTION
2 AGING ORGANIZATION
3 PUBLIC (FEDERAL, STATE OR LOCAL)
4 OTHER (SPECIFY) _____

Collection size

5 LESS THAN 5,000 VOLUMES
☐ 6 5,000 TO 10,000 VOLUMES
7 MORE THAN 10,000 VOLUMES

◆◆◆

All Respondents - Circle number of your answer

Q-1C Do you favor or oppose networking between both groups?

☐

1 STRONGLY FAVOR
2 FAVOR
3 SOMEWHAT FAVOR
4 SOMEWHAT OPPOSE
5 OPPOSE
6 STRONGLY OPPOSE

Q-2 Do you believe your parent organization would support such a network?

☐

1 DEFINITELY WOULD
2 PROBABLY WOULD
3 PROBABLY WOULD NOT
4 DEFINITELY WOULD NOT

NETWORK ORGANIZATION ISSUES

Q-3 If such a network were to be established, would you be willing to pay a membership fee?

☐

Yes ( ) No ( )

Q-4 If "Yes", indicate how much:

☐

1 $10.00
2 $ up to $100.00
3 more than $100.00

Q-5 If network planning meetings were to be held, which would be your preference:

☐

1 IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA (ANNUAL MEETING)
2 IN CONJUNCTION WITH SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION (ANNUAL MEETING)
3 CALL SPECIAL MEETING TO PLAN AND ORGANIZA A NETWORK
4 OTHER (specify) _____

_____

Q-6 If such a network were to be developed, what would be your preference for its organizational structure:

☐

(Circle number(s) of your preference, as many as applicable)

1 APPOINT/SELECT NETWORK DIRECTOR/CHAIRPERSON
2 APPOINT/SELECT A GOVERNING COMMITTEE
3 DESIGNATE A RESOURCE CENTER AS NETWORK HEAD-QUARTERS
4 OTHER (specify please) _____

_____

_____

_____

## NETWORK SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

Q-7 Please rate all of the following library activities by their importanct to networking:

| | | A VERY IMPORTANT | B SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT | C LEAST IMPORTANT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ 1 | BIBLIOGRAPHIC PROJECTS | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 2 | CATALOGING | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 3 | CARD CATALOG PRODUCTION | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 4 | CLEARINGHOUSE FUNCTIONS | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 5 | COMMUNICATIONS VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL (e.g. ONTYME II) | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 6 | INTERLIBRARY LOAN SERVICE | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 7 | JOINT PURCHASE OF MATERIALS | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 8 | JOINT RESEARCH PROJECTS | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 9 | PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 10 | PERSONNEL TRAINING | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 11 | REFERENCE SERVICES | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 12 | SELECTION | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 13 | STORAGE CENTER | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 14 | UNION CATALOGS OR LISTS | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 15 | ORIENTATION PROGRAMS | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 16 | OTHERS (please specify)_____ | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |
| | _____ | ( ) | ( ) | ( ) |

Q-8 Please check specific products/services your resource center would share on a regular basis with network participants. (Check as many as appropriate.)

| | | A YES | B NO |
|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ 1 | AUTOMATED LITERATURE SEARCHES | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 2 | IF "YES," FOR FEE | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 3 | CATALOG CARD PRODUCTION | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 4 | CATALOGING | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 5 | CLEARINGHOUSE SERVICES (e.g. bibliographic information or job line) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 6 | GLOSSARIES | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 7 | INDEXING | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 8 | IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTOMATED SYSTEMS OR DATA BASES | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 9 | JOINT PURCHASE and/or SELECTION (specialization by subject or geographical area) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 10 | INTERLIBRARY LOANS | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 11 | JOURNAL HOLDING LIST | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 12 | PUBLICATIONS, (e.g. newsletter, directory, users' guide) | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 13 | SELECTIVE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 14 | STORAGE SPACE | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 15 | THESAURUS | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 16 | TRAINING MANUAL | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 17 | UNION CATALOG OR LIST | ( ) | ( ) |
| ☐ 18 | OTHER (please specify)_____ | ( ) | ( ) |
| | _____ | | |

Q-9 Are you currently participating formally or informally in networking activities with other centers in the field (excluding interlibrary loan)?

FORMALLY

☐ 1 If no, check here _____
2 If yes, specify _____

INFORMALLY

☐ 3 If no, check here _____
4 If yes, specify _____

Please return the completed survey in the enclosed envelope not later than March 31, 1982.

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